

South Dakota National Guard

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April 30, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

National Guard recognizes BHSU athletes for military service

By Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann
SDNG Public Affairs Office

SPEARFISH, S.D. – The South Dakota Army National Guard recognized two Black Hills State University athletes during an athletic awards banquet at the Donald E. Young Center, April 28.

Spc. Rebecca Green, a Yellow Jacket softball player, and Sgt. Luke Whalen, a receiver on the Yellow Jacket football team, are both members of the 842nd Engineer Company and received the BHSU Soldier Athlete Award for putting their athletic careers on hold to serve their country.

During Green's second year at BHSU, she made the decision to join the SDARNG and in September 2011, enlisted as a unit supply specialist.

"I joined the National Guard for not only money for school, but to become more of a role model for my nieces and nephews," said Green, of Rapid City. "I am a coach, so being a role model for the kiddos. It's good to be someone they can look up to and trust."

Enlisting in the National Guard required Green to temporarily stop playing softball to attend basic training (10 weeks) and advanced individual training (eight weeks).

"Overall, it has worked out," said Green. "I'm incredibly happy to do both. The National Guard has advanced my softball career enormously as I've become a better leader, more outspoken and I work better with people now."

Those traits are reflected in her softball statistics.

"Two of her better years as a softball player were after she returned from military training," said Coach Lane Leedy. "I have a tremendous amount of respect for what she's accomplished. She came back from training a better athlete with a sounder mind."

Becky tallied seven home runs and 47 RBIs throughout her Yellow Jacket career and hit a career best .488 slugging percentage during her senior season. She was recognized as a two-time Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference All-Academic Team honoree (2014 and 2015).

"Spc. Green is the epitome of a team player and her desire to succeed makes her a true asset to the South Dakota Army National Guard," said Staff Sgt. Anson Juelfs, Green's squad leader.

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She will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in elementary education with honors in May.

Whalen enlisted into SDARNG in 2008 as a heavy construction equipment operator while still a senior at Wagner High School.

“I had an overwhelming desire to join the military,” said Whalen. “I wanted to enlist in the active duty right out of high school but my dad asked me about playing college football.”

Whalen and his dad discussed his goals further and kept coming back to the National Guard, which would allow him to pursue his long-term goals.

“Military, college football and an education,” said Whalen. “The National Guard fit the mold. I could serve in the military like I wanted to, and play college football like I wanted to. So it was a perfect fit.”

Whalen played two seasons before deploying to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2011, where he served for 13 months with the 842nd. He returned to BHSU in 2013 where he would play another two seasons.

“Coming back from the deployment made football more fun,” said Whalen. “There are other things going on in the world and I got to be a part of that. Football didn’t seem so serious anymore.”

He finished his Yellow Jacket career with 121 receptions for 2,569 receiving yards, scoring 13 touchdowns.

“His ability to come back and finish his career and to eventually get his degree is a testament to his desire and commitment to this University and the BHSU Football Team,” said Coach John Reiners. “More than anything...I think the deployment helped develop him as a person. To say it made him a better football player, yeah but that’s so trivial when it comes to the fact that it made him a better person.”

Whalen was recognized twice as a Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference All-Conference selection; second team in 2014 and third team in 2013.

He will graduate with a Bachelor of Science in physical education next year.

Whalen said he would recommend the National Guard to other college athletes.

“You get the opportunity to use all of these education benefits and go to school, as well as play a sport that you love while serving in the military.”

“Both Soldiers represent the citizen-Soldier and the Soldier-athlete well, said Capt. Matthew Sadler, 842nd commander. “We’re proud that they’ve both been able to compete so well at the collegiate level, challenge themselves academically and physically, all while serving their community, state and nation.”



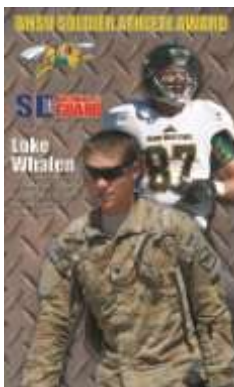
150428-Z-CW157-001: U.S. Army Capt. Matthew Sadler, commander of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company, presents the Black Hills State University Soldier Athlete Award to Spc. Becky Green during an awards banquet at the Donald E. Young Center in Spearfish, S.D., April 28, 2015. Green joined the National Guard while attending college, putting her softball career on hold, to serve her country. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



150428-Z-ZZ999-001: The South Dakota Army National Guard presented Spc. Becky Green, with the 842nd Engineer Company, the Black Hills State University Soldier Athlete Award during an awards banquet at the Donald E. Young Center in Spearfish, S.D., April 28, 2015. Green joined the National Guard while attending college, putting her softball career on hold, to serve her country. The banner is on display at the Donald E. Young Center. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



150428-Z-CW157-005: The South Dakota Army National Guard presented Sgt. Luke Whalen, of the 842nd Engineer Company, with the Black Hills State University Soldier Athlete Award during an awards banquet at the Donald E. Young Center in Spearfish, S.D., April 28, 2015. Whalen spent 13 months in Afghanistan, putting his college football career on hold to serve his country. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)



150428-Z-ZZ999-002: The South Dakota Army National Guard presented Sgt. Luke Whalen, of the 842nd Engineer Company, with the Black Hills State University Soldier Athlete Award during an awards banquet at the Donald E. Young Center in Spearfish, S.D., April 28, 2015. Whalen spent 13 months in Afghanistan, putting his college football career on hold to serve his country. The banner is on display at the Donald E. Young Center. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Herrmann/Released)

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